

AN
E S S A Y
ON THE
ADVANTAGES of REVELATION.

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TO

THE MOST REVEREND FATHER IN GOD

WILLIAM,

BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE,

LORD ARCHBISHOP OF YORK,

PRIMATE OF ENGLAND AND METROPOLITAN,

THIS ESSAY IS

(BY HIS GRACE'S PERMISSION)

INSCRIBED,

WITH SENTIMENTS OF VENERATION AND GRATITUDE,

BY HIS GRACE'S MOST OBLIGED

AND MOST DEVOTED SERVANT,

JOSEPH WHITELEY.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE substance of the following Essay was published by the Author, at a very early age, in consequence of having gained the first Norrisian Prize in the University of Cambridge. After many alterations and additions, it is again submitted to the public on a more extensive plan, and, perhaps, somewhat more worthy their acceptance.

A N E S S A Y

ON THE

ADVANTAGES of REVELATION.

AS we are endued with capacities of enjoyment and powers of action, it is of importance to enquire in what circumstances we are placed; what opportunities we enjoy of exerting our powers, and with what means we are furnished of improving our happiness. These enquiries are important, when they respect the present life; but they become our indispensable duty, when we are assured, on the testimony of Revelation, that our conduct in this world is closely connected with our immortal interests.

Whether we contemplate the system of Nature or of Revelation, the End of our researches is, to illustrate some of the perfections of that Divine Being; who, it is presumed, is equally the author of both.

These

These perfections, as they exist in the Deity, may, possibly, be all of the same nature: To the human mind, however, they present different appearances. The physical attributes seem awful and terrible: The moral amiable and transporting. The former are displayed in the works of Nature: The latter are principally manifested in the page of Revelation; and are the basis of our love and reverence, of our resignation and gratitude.

The goodness, righteousness, and holiness of God, are sometimes considered as different modes only of the same perfection; as comprized within the general idea of divine benevolence: But, when applied to the moral prism, like the rays of the sun, they appear separate and distinct; and diffuse, some a more splendid, others a milder and more gentle lustre over the eye of the beholder.

Of these attributes, none has been more frequently, or more deservedly, the object of contemplation, than that of Goodness. When we look abroad into the universe, and discover what accommodations are provided for the convenience, or the pleasure of man; when we see every object capable of gratifying his eye with beauty, or his ear with music; when we find the understanding, the will, the imagination and the passions, so many sources, or avenues, of pleasure; we cannot be backward to acknowledge, in the language of inspiration, that "the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord."

If we turn from nature to Revelation, we shall behold still more striking proofs of the divine bounty.

To abolish the dreadful consequences of sin; to restore the soul to its native dignity; and to qualify it, by a course of moral discipline,
for

for eternal happiness, are the ends of Revelation in general; they are the direct purpose of the Christian Religion in particular; and if they have been, in any degree, accomplished, by methods which human wisdom could never have devised, they give to Revelation a decided superiority over Reason.

The importance of supernatural instruction must always be measured by the benefits it procures for man. These benefits are placed, sometimes in his hand; always within his reach; and while some solicit his acceptance, others are proposed to his industry; and are not to be obtained, without a course of laborious and painful application. If then it shall appear, from the subsequent remarks, that Religion has procured, either any actual, or attainable benefits: If it has been followed by consequences, which have either a direct, or indirect, tendency to promote the general happiness; —these benefits and consequences may be assumed as so many distinct advantages of Revelation.

In investigating the benefits peculiar to Revelation, it may be useful to consult experience; and to consider, not to what good mankind might possibly have been conducted by Reason, or into what evil they might have fallen, when destitute of every other guide(a); but simply, how far they have, in fact, discovered, the relations they bear to the Deity, and to their fellow-creatures; and, of course, how far they are indebted to Reason, for the foundation of piety and benevolence.

The

(a) See the *Norristian Professor's Heads of a Course of Lectures in Divinity*. Book 1: chap. 19. page 12.

The relation we bear to the Deity might easily be deduced from the knowledge of his existence, unity, perfections, and providence ; but of these truths, it will here be attempted to evince that the bulk of the heathen world have had, at all times, a very imperfect notion.

It cannot indeed be denied that the most barbarous nations, in all ages, have entertained some ideas of a superiour Being, the Creator and Governor of the universe ; but it is probable that they derived these ideas indirectly from the Jews. They were so generally accustomed to indulge their passions, that their reason became subservient to their inclinations ; and so intent were they on sensual pleasures, that it is highly improbable they should attempt the discovery of religious truth. Even where philosophy was cultivated with success, the multitude were blindly addicted to polytheism ; they ascribed the imperfections of human nature, to the objects of their adoration ; they canonized the vices of their favourite heroes and lawgivers ; and at length they descended to the worship of demons and of reptiles, of vices and even of diseases.

If we turn from the blind multitude, to the philosophers of antiquity, we shall not have greater satisfaction in viewing their principles, than in surveying the notions of the meanest of the people. From both it will appear that the sublime truths of theology are not obtruded on mankind ; they will seem rather to retire whenever they are pursued, and to elude the researches of philosophy, as much as the gaze of heedless ignorance(a).

Whole

(a) *The religious institutions of Romulus and Numa, though founded in piety, were extremely superstitious and absurd. See Livy's Hist. l. 1. c. 21. l. 45. c. 39. Plut. Life of Numa, p. 69. Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 3. c. 2.*

Whole sects of philosophers, as the Sceptics and Academics, held the divine Unity to be a disputable doctrine ; or rather, involved it, according to the avowed tenets of the former, and even of the latter when their verisimile could not be introduced, in absolute darkness and uncertainty. Some of those who admitted the Unity of God, believed him to be space, duration, or matter infinitely extended ; some denied, or doubted, his providence(a) : Others believed that all things were governed by a necessity, as absolute, and immutable, as the divine will(b) : They contended that God had retired from the system of his works ; and that he concerned himself very little, or not at all, with human events, or human actions(c).

The best of these philosophers conformed to the practice of Idolatry ; and recommended the modes of worship established in their respective countries(d). Even Plato supported the popular superstition ; by recommending the worship of the stars, and enjoining the celebration of twelve festivals, in honour of the twelve superior Deities(e). Such were the mistakes of the wise men of this world ; and they afford an invincible proof that we are indebted to Revelation, even for the first principles of natural religion.

The philosophers were greatly divided in their opinions respecting the supreme good of man. In this, every individual claimed the right of private judgment. The variety of pursuits would equal the variety of opinions(f) : For, in general, men follow that path, which,

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they

(a) *Peripatetics. See De Nat. Deor. l. 3. c. 39.* (b) *Stoics.* (c) *The greater Mysteries seem to have been intended to correct the extremes of poetic fable and philosophic scepticism ; the event proved an incongruous coalition of both.* (d) *The circumstances attending the death of Socrates afford a complete proof of this.* (e) *See Plato's 4th book of Laws.* (f) *It is well observed by Cicero, that they who disagree concerning the nature of the chief good, must of course differ in the whole system of precepts for the conduct of life.*

they are persuaded, leads to happiness; and they judge those objects to constitute happiness or misery, which appear lovely or deformed to their own imaginations. Since then the attainment of our chief good depends upon the choice of a proper course of action; and since, in this choice, we are liable to form mistaken judgments; it ought to be esteemed a decided advantage of Revelation, that all errors of judgment are thereby removed; and that the path is clearly marked out, which leads to the true happiness and perfection of our nature.

Revelation is usually distinguished into three periods. The first comprizes the age of the patriarchs; with whom the Almighty condescended to converse, as man with man. The second relates to the Jewish Theocracy. The doctrines of this system were, in substance, the same which had been delivered to the Patriarchs. They contained a concise, yet comprehensive, summary, of moral precepts. They enjoined a variety of rites; some, as memorials of the most signal blessings of Providence; others, as types, to prefigure a more perfect system; others, again, for reasons, useful enough, we presume, to the Jewish polity; but which cannot, at this distance, be assigned with precision. The celebration of these rites was confined to the honour of the true God; and the rites themselves were entirely devoid of the obscenity and cruelty, which distinguished the pagan superstition.

This singular constitution was rendered still more remarkable by a succession of prophets; whose predictions were chiefly calculated to excite an expectation of the Messiah. This great Personage was to publish a more glorious Revelation; the extent of which should be universal, and which should improve true Religion to the highest degree of perfection. The divine light was thus admitted at distant
times

times, and by several gradations, upon a world involved in the grossest darkness. At first it seemed a glimmering, but distant ray; afterwards it became a star; and, at length, a constellation.

As the discoveries of the two former periods were comprehended in the Christian Revelation, and incorporated with it; it will be allowable to confine our remarks, principally, to the latter: Whether we consider its own intrinsic worth; or the prepollency of its advantages, over the institutions of paganism.

The primary advantage of Christianity, is, the offer of pardon to repenting sinners. This offer is as wide in its extent, as it is beneficial in its effects. It concerns every individual of the human race; since those, who never knew the commands of Revelation, have violated the precepts of the law of nature. The truth of this general position is confirmed by every page of profane, as well as sacred, history: And if we can view, without emotion, the treachery of ambition, and the insolence and ravages of power; if our indignation is not kindled with unusual warmth, at the hypocrisy, rapine, and murders, of past ages; it is, because we are accustomed to the repetition of the same crimes, at the present day.

But, it may be objected that Repentance is a doctrine of natural religion(a); and, as it procures the regard of an earthly, it cannot fail to conciliate the favour of our heavenly, parent(b).

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In

(a) *Quem pœnitet peccasse, pene est innocens.* Seneca. See also the ninth book of the *Iliad*, verse 495. Tibullus, l. 11. eleg. 1. v. 13. Cic. de Legib. 11. 8. 10.

(b) The old objection of Celsus and Zosimus, that Christianity opens the kingdom of heaven to vice and folly, would apply equally to all religions; and, therefore, is of no force against any.

In general, it may be granted, that a disobedient child, by returning to his duty, will regain the esteem of an affectionate father; but that esteem will always be diminished, in proportion as the son has deviated from the path of virtue: And if, in the calm moments of retirement, the penitent reviews his own misconduct with remorse; he will naturally be more alarmed with the fear of punishment, than soothed with the hope of pardon; because he will expect the smile, or the frown, of his judge, as he is approved, or condemned, by his own conscience.

Without presuming to limit the divine mercy, it may be observed, that our reasonings are then only conclusive, when they coincide with facts; and we ought to suspect some fallacy, when our conclusions, on the future distribution of rewards and punishments, are not consistent with the present œconomy of providence. Now, it is no uncommon thing to see a person lamenting his past intemperance, when his powers are debilitated and his spirits exhausted; who, yet, can neither regain the vigour of manhood, nor retard the infirmities of a dishonourable, because premature, old age(a). Instances like these, presented by experience, will correct our reasonings on the moral world; and incline us to doubt the efficacy of repentance in the remission of guilt.

To a person who has any notion of a moral Governor of the world, and who is conscious of having violated the divine laws, and, of consequence, of being obnoxious to punishment, the advantage of knowing how he might become reconciled to God, and avert his displeasure, would appear in a striking light: But this knowledge cannot be obtained by the utmost efforts of human reason. The fear of
divine

(a) See Butler's *Analogy*, part 1. c. 2.

divine punishment has been the most copious source of superstition; and the expedients, which have been devised to remove it(a), serve only to shew the darkness in which mankind were of necessity involved, when destitute of the light of Revelation.

The wisest heathens saw, and lamented, the prevalence of moral evil. They discerned that virtue was the perfection of human nature, and thence concluded it was the law of heaven. Conscious of their own failings, and ignorant of their future destination, they built altars, instituted festivals, sacrificed victims, and adopted every device, which seemed likely to appease the vengeance of their gods. From these religious services, it may be inferred that they had some general idea of the divine placability, although it was far from being either adequate or distinct: It was sufficient to cherish their hopes, and, perhaps, in a few instances, to kindle their devotion; but it could seldom relieve the most philosophic mind from the apprehension of punishment. It was reserved for the Gospel to sooth the anxiety of the human breast: And if we are unusually disturbed by the consciousness of guilt, we ought to be inspired with unbounded gratitude for that divine Revelation, which offers pardon to the penitent, and salvation to those, who could neither be justified by the law of Moses(b), nor acquitted by the religion of nature(c).

From a review of the facts already mentioned, we may hazard the opinion that a complete system of natural religion was never established

(a) *For the various modes of expiation, see the Choix des Memoires de L'Academie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres. Vol. 1. p. 16---22. 4to. London, 1777.*

(b) *The Jewish law provided no expiation for adultery, murder, idolatry, &c.*

(c) *Constantine the Great was accused of seeking refuge in the promises of the Gospel, when the religion of his fathers could no longer absolve him from his crimes.*

blished in any age or nation. From whence then, it may be asked, did the philosophers derive many opinions similar to the discoveries of Revelation? more especially, the superiority of the good Deity to the evil Demon; the original perfection(a), the subsequent fall(b), and the final restoration of man(c). We answer, most probably from tradition, and from intercourse with the Jews; since from them, through the hands of the Phenicians, they derived the materials of language, and the principles of jurisprudence(d). This intercourse, though long obstructed by the nature of the Jewish constitution; was at length facilitated by the number of profelytes, who repaired from all parts to Jerusalem; and who would not fail to publish, at their return, the tenets of the religion they had adopted. Josephus informs us(e), that there were Jews dispersed throughout the Roman Empire(f); the tyranny of Antiochus and Pompey, and the insolence of the Roman Soldiers, having caused some of them to migrate into Syria, Asia-minor, Greece and Italy. Some ages after the Babylonish captivity, many families of them were settled in Assyria; and even colonies were planted from the banks of the Nile to those of the Euphrates(g). Add to this, the translation of the Old Testament

(a) See whatever the poets have fabled of the golden age. Plato, speaking of the men who lived in this happy age, says, that God was their keeper, and fed them as a shepherd. See also Grotius *de Veritate*, book 1. sec. 16. Also *De Jure Belli*, book 1. chap. 1. sec. 2. and notes. (b) The Indian in Strabo says, that Jupiter, enraged at man's apostacy, withdrew his principal blessings; and, instead of a life of enjoyment, imposed a life of labour, book 15. (c) See Virgil's Silenus. The universal use of expiatory sacrifices, and the purity of life required of those who were initiated in the mysteries, indicates a hope of final restoration. (d) See Grotius *de Veritate*, sec. 15. book 1. (e) See his *Ancient History*, lib. xii. c. 23.---xiv. 17.---xvi. 4.---xiii. 4, 5, 6, &c. xviii. 10. (f) This might also be collected from Horace's *First Book of Satires*, sat. iv. v. and ix. *Juv. sat. xiv.* and many of Martial's Epigrams. (g) See Collier's *Sacred Interpreter*, vol. 2. 144.

Testament into Greek, after the enlargement of the Macedonian empire; whereby those heathens had access to the Jewish opinions, who could for a moment relinquish their prejudices; and condescend to peruse the writings of a nation, too abject and contemptible, in the public opinion, to attract the attention of a reasonable man. The honourable testimony which Longinus has borne to the sublimity of Moses, and the mention made of him long before by Diodorus Siculus, Strabo and Tacitus, is a further presumption that the Heathens were not unacquainted with the Jewish scriptures.

But whatever communication the Heathens might have had with the Jews, it will not be denied that they had commerce with the Phenicians: Now the Phenician history of the creation is almost a transcript of the narrative of Moses; and the frequent allusions of the heathen authors to this great event, is a proof that they were conversant with the writings of the one or the other(a). From this source then, we may conclude, the Heathens derived whatever notions they had of the divine placability, and whatever rites they employed to perpetuate the hope of mercy.

As we have considered the offer of pardon as the leading advantage of Christianity; it may seem strange that so great a blessing is unknown at this day, in many parts of the world: but the difficulty will entirely vanish, if this part of the Christian dispensation can be proved analogous to the course of Providence: For all arguments, which militate against the system of nature, must be inconclusive, on the principles of theism, when applied to Revelation(b). Now the
unequal

(a) See *Virgil's Sixth Eclogue*, line 33. *First Georgic*, line 133. *Lucretius*, v. 325. *Tacitus*, *Ann.* III. *Aristotle's Third Book*, sec. chap. on the *Generation of Animals*. *First Book of Ovid's Metamorphosis*. (b) See *Butler's Analogy*, part I. *passim*.

unequal distribution of temporal good is exactly similar to that of spiritual benefits; and therefore the partial extent of Christianity cannot afford the shadow of an objection to a reasonable man, until he can explain, why the common blessings of Providence are disseminated, in some countries, with a profuse, in others, with a sparing, hand; or why the natural powers of the mind are so various; that they leave some nations utterly uncivilized; while they prompt others to a proficiency in knowledge and in arts, in commerce and in legislation.

The same reply may be made to the objection against the sufferings of Christ. To permit an innocent person to suffer for the benefit of the guilty, is not contradictory to our ideas of the divine goodness; and it is mere idle declamation to assert, that, if the Deity was the author of the Christian Revelation, he was actuated by malice and revenge.

Objections of this nature cannot be admitted, because they would disprove facts. Instances of vicarious punishment occur daily, and may perhaps be necessary, in this state of probation; and if they be necessary in any one case, this is sufficient to silence every cavil: For it is as presumptuous to dispute the goodness of God, as it would be to suspect his wisdom, merely because every mode of its exertion is not explicable by human reason. The advantages of the system of nature, as well as Revelation, are established on solid foundations; and therefore, cannot be affected by the sophistry, or the ignorance, of man. In both, it is the divine purpose to dispense the materials of happiness; which, however they be misapplied, are neither intentionally, nor necessarily, the occasions of misery. In neither can be discovered a design terminating in evil. Even those instances of
misery,

misery, which, to a careless observer, seem direct indications of malevolence, will appear, on a closer enquiry, casual appendages only, to a scheme of happiness; and capable of being referred to general laws, which, if universally executed, would produce universal good.

Perhaps we know not all the reasons, why penal functions are necessary to the natural government of the universe: But we see distinctly many cases, in which they are eminently useful; and we know enough to convince us, that, without them, not only the happiness, but even the conservation, of the species, would rest on a precarious foundation.

These advantages must appear of the greatest moment, when considered as the basis of religious education. In the occurrences and exigencies of common life, men are determined more by habit than by reflection. They either deliberate not at all, or their reasonings are biased by their inclinations. The attainment then of virtuous habits seems intended by providence to supply the defects of the moral principle(a). By early discipline and established worship, the principles of religion are interwoven into the human frame; they are matured and strengthened by exercise; they forcibly impel to virtuous exertions, and prove an invincible defence throughout the christian warfare.

Atheism has been justly accused of tending to subvert morality; because it precludes the apprehension of punishment by removing the fear of inspection. Superstition is no less fatal to the happiness of society. It debases the principles, enervates the sentiments, and

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checks

(a) *Paley's Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy, conclusion of the last Chapter of the first Book.*

checks the most arduous efforts of the soul. Had the heathens divested their gods of caprice and revenge, their mythology might have yielded the semblance of protection, if not actual support to virtue. But when they associated with their deities (a) a weak and degenerate race of mortals (b), the empire of the human heart was divided by contending principles; every vice was honoured with a celestial patron; and the most abandoned profligacy was palliated, if not wholly excused, by the example of the Gods(c).

But, had these deities been superior to human infirmities, the Genius of polytheism would soon have extinguished the flame of devotion. It provided no mode of public instruction; it convened no assemblies for public adoration (d); it appointed no thanksgivings, no prayers for divine assistance, no sorrow for past offences; it enjoined no solemnities, except what were purely ceremonial; it considered external forms as a commutation for crimes; and it defiled the most sacred rites, especially those of Cybele, Bacchus and Venus, with frantic mirth, and with the almost unrestrained intercourse of the sexes(e).

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(a) *The superior gods themselves seem to have been originally men who had done some signal benefit to their country. The Cretans boasted they could shew the sepulchre of Jupiter. See Porphyry's Life of Pythagoras, n. 17.* (b) *Cicero informs us that the deification of heroes was intended as a spur to valour. De Nat. Deor. l. 3. c. 19.* (c) *Ego homuncio hoc non facerem, was a constant excuse. See Terence's Eunuch, Act III. Scene 5, and the Comedies of Plautus and Euripides throughout.* (d) *Except on such extraordinary occasions as those mentioned by Livy, l. 3, c. 7. l. 29. c. 14.* (e) *The Pagan rites were impure, almost beyond conception, in the festivals of Flora, Bacchus and Pan. See Ovid's 4th book De Fast. Origen's 8th book against Celsus, and the 5th book of Livy. The world perhaps never beheld such an open contempt of decency as in the procession of the Κραις & φαλλος.*

The desires kindled by these rites were very different from the chaste flame of devotion. They collected to a point those fervid passions which ought to have been equally diffused; and, like converging rays, too often consumed the nobler qualities of the soul, which they were designed to enliven, to invigorate, and to expand.

If we turn for a moment to the worship prescribed by Revelation, we shall find it at once rational and manly. It regards man as a compound being, susceptible of impressions from sensible images, yet capable of the purest mental contemplation. It admits a few positive institutions, not indeed as substitutes for inward piety, but as helps to that intellectual devotion which constitutes the essence of religion. In short, it forms such a coalition between the form and the spirit of godliness, as is exactly suited to the nature of the human constitution. A religion like this, is equally remote from the fervour of enthusiasm, and the indifference of superstition: As the rays of light, (to pursue the allusion just mentioned) when blended in just proportions, form that candid appearance, which has the advantages of all colours and shades, without the peculiarities of any.

Another advantage of the Christian Revelation consists in enforcing its precepts by powerful sanctions; by the promise of eternal life to the faithful, and the denunciation of eternal death against the disobedient and impenitent.

Every man has some post allotted him by Providence, which it requires all his vigilance to guard, and all his firmness to defend. He is seldom environed at once by the united force of temptation, but more generally assaulted by some one singly; and, when that is repelled, another and another succeeds to the charge. Now,
what

what is there to support the candidate for heaven, in the day of trial; or to inspire him with fidelity and courage? The Religion of nature may assign the influence of conscience (a); the pride of philosophy may appeal to the beauty of virtue (b), or the artificial sanctions of honour (c): But the experience of all ages has abundantly proved, that the united force of honour, of moral beauty, and of conscience, have been unable to resist the allurements of vice, to despise the scoffs of persecution, or to defy the menaces of banishment and of death. The Christian Revelation alone has effectually sublimed the hopes, and alarmed the fears, of the human breast; and while it enforces the precepts of the moral law, it enables us, by divine assistance, to escape the punishments of sin, and to obtain the rewards of persevering virtue.

As a future state is the foundation of all our hopes and fears, it is interesting, as well as curious, to examine how far, and upon what grounds, it has prevailed.

Perhaps a few of the wisest Heathens were almost (d) convinced of a future state. Perhaps the bulk of the pagan world believed it on the authority of the magistrate, who had prudently employed it as an engine

(a) *This was assigned by the Platonists.* (b) *See Clarke's Evidences, p. 5. 6th Edit.* (c) *Bayle's Pensées Diverses. passim.* (d) *Their conviction was by no means complete. Cum posui librum, & mecum ipse de immortalitate animorum cæpi cogitare, assentio omnis i-la elabitur Tusculan Questions, book 1st, chap. 11th. See also Seneca's Epist. 102. 95. Felix qui---Metus omnes et inexorabile fatum---subjecit pedibus. Georg. 11. 490. Stoici---diu mansuros arunt animos, semper negant. Tusculan Questions, Book 1st, Chap. 31st. These Questions, with the Somnium Scipionis, and the Treatise De Senectute, comprehend most of the arguments which reason can discover on this subject.*

engine of government (a). But it may be affirmed, without hazard, that the stream of conviction was never diffused over any nation, unless it flowed from the springs of Jewish tradition, or through the channels of Christian inspiration(b).

The most ancient of the Greek poets, historians, and philosophers, who have had occasion to mention the religion of their country, have always reckoned a future state among its leading doctrines(c). The rewards and punishments of this state were formed by the Poets into a system; but they were combined with so many ludicrous fables, and so accommodated to the popular superstition, that the philosophers, who renounced the one, abandoned the other also,

The followers of Democritus, Pyrrho and Epicurus, openly denied the immortality of the soul; and the rest of the ancient sages would have joined in rejecting it, had they adhered uniformly to the two fundamental principles of their philosophy. One of these principles was, "That the Deity was never angry, nor hurt any one(d);" whereby the apprehension of punishment after death is entirely removed. The other was a mistaken notion of the soul. Those who held the soul to be something more than a mere quality, imagined it

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(a) The reader will find the opinions of almost all the ancient nations on this subject in Grotius *de Veritate*, page 73, 93, 185, 187, and 193. (b) Caius Cæsar in Sallust, denies a future state of retribution, which M. Protius Cato immediately afterwards coldly affirms to be generally believed by the people. (c) Plutarch informs us that we may possibly discover in the world cities without laws, arts, learning, property and walls, but we can no where find a city without the notion of future rewards and punishments. See his *Traët against Colotes the Epicurean*. *Tusc. Disp.* l. 1. c. 16. Seneca, *Ep.* 117. (d) Num iratum timimus Jovem? *Æc. Off.* l. 3. c. 28. *De Nat. Deor.* l. 1. c. 17.

to be a part detached from a whole : Which whole was, with some, the one universal substance, the *το εἶναι*; with others, the union of God and matter (a). As the latter held the soul to be a particle discerped from the substance of the Deity, they believed it would be united to him again, as the body is to its parent matter ; but not necessarily at the same time ; as the doctrine of the Metempsychosis, which was generally taught in the mysteries, admitted the soul to undergo a variety of changes, and to animate a succession of different bodies(b).

From these principles, that the Deity was never angry, and that the soul was part of his substance, the avowed consequence was, a disbelief of future rewards and punishments.

Cicero is cautious of declaring his sentiments on this subject. Whatever argument he produces, is delivered as the doctrine of the Stoic, the Epicurean, the Academic, or the Platonist. Whenever he seems in earnest, he is strangely inconsistent. In the first book of *Tusculan Questions*, he contends, that the soul is not only immortal, but even uncreated, and self-existent. In his *Orations* (c) and *Epistles* (d), he considers the extinction of being, as the greatest consolation against the fear of death.

In order to prevent the confusion which these sceptical opinions might create in the minds of the people, the magistrate had recourse
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(a) See *Divine Legation*, book 3. sect. 4. (b) This Egyptian doctrine was carried to most extravagant lengths. The Indian Bramins taught that the Gods themselves removed from one body to another ; and one of their sects, which settled in China in the first century, introduced the belief that their tutelary god transmigrated from one Lama into another. See Michaelis' *Lectures*, page 248. (c) *Pro Cluentio*. (d) *Lib. 5. ep. 21. l. 6. ep. 3.*

to the mysteries. And such was the reputation of these useful institutions, that, though they had been confined in Egypt to the honour of Isis and Osiris, they were soon established in many parts of Asia and Europe, from the Bramins in India to the Druids in Britain; and celebrated under the protection of Mithras, Cybele, Jupiter, Ceres, or any other Deity who had authority enough to secure the veneration of his votaries. By whatever name these mysteries were distinguished, they had this common end in view, to exhibit the representation of a future life (a); and when the Mystagogue proposed this life as the reward of virtue, he always taught the divine Unity and Providence (b), in order that the initiated might have a solid foundation, whereon to build their hopes (c).

But whatever extravagance appears in the poets, or scepticism in the philosophers, there is no presumption from reason against the immortality of the soul. For, admitting it to be incorporeal, (and the contrary can never be proved,) it is not subject to any change, from a finite power, even in the mode of its existence (d); and therefore cannot perish but by annihilation, which there is no reason to apprehend. A materialist cannot prove, on his own principles, the probability of annihilation, because he cannot prove that a single particle of matter is ever destroyed. All he can shew is the possibility that its present form and properties may be changed, and its parts be dissolved into ashes or dust, into smoke or vapour. But, admitting all these changes, the soul must still remain, till it be reduced to nothing by its omnipotent

(a) See Cicero *De Nat. Deor.* l. 1. *De Leg.* l. 2. c. 14. Origen against Celsus, l. 3, and 4. (b) Plutarch *de Is. & Osir.* (c) See this subject ably discussed in the *Divine Legation*, book 2. sect. 4. (d) Socrates contends in Plato that the soul is *αθάνατος*, and therefore *αυωλεστος*. Which Cicero thus translates: *Nec distrabi, nec discerpi potest, nec interire igitur.*

tent Creator. It cannot, on any principles, be discovered that Death is the suspension, much less the destruction of our intellectual faculties; because we have no distinct conception of the nature of that substance in which the power of thinking inheres; and there cannot surely be any certain knowledge, where there is neither experience to convince the understanding, nor analogy to direct the judgment.

But it is not enough to shew there are no certain grounds to expect the extinction of being: It is of more consequence to observe, that reason, in its present improved state, may discover, to a very high degree of probability, that the soul will survive the dissolution of the body; and be admitted into a state, more favourable than the present, to the exercise of its intellectual and moral powers: It may also suggest, that every man will be accountable hereafter, for the whole of his conduct here: But, whether the laws of distributive justice will be executed immediately after death; whether they will be suspended, so as to admit a change of moral dispositions, and further attainments in knowledge; or whether the state, immediately succeeding the present, will unfold new scenes of temptation, and successive occasions of discipline;—these are subjects too remote from the sphere of reason; and can be determined by that awful Being alone, whose power created, whose spirit illumines, and whose providence sustains and governs the world.

Still it may be urged that if the light of nature cannot discover the certainty of a future state, it will be unjust in the Deity to punish mankind hereafter for their misconduct here; because it is unfair to bind men by a law, without forewarning them of the consequences of its violation. It is answered, that proper allowances will certainly be made for human ignorance, so far as it is not criminal: But there
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are few instances, wherein the voice of conscience is so feeble as never to suggest the apprehension of being accountable. The world, amidst all its disorders, may be clearly discerned to be under the administration of a Governor whose law is virtue (a) : And it requires no subtilty of argumentation to shew that the transgression of this law implies a desert of punishment. Admitting then some punishment to be due to the sinner, if there be no ground to expect remission, (and from reason alone there is none), it will be perfectly just in the Deity to inflict it, in what mode, and to what degree, it shall seem best to his unerring wisdom.

Another capital advantage of the Christian Revelation, is, the republication and authoritative enforcement of the moral law. This law had been perverted by the Jews, and but imperfectly understood by the Heathens. The former adhered to the letter, while they neglected the spirit, of the divine command. They imagined that the ceremonial, like the moral, law, was to be of eternal obligation. They exalted positive institutions to the rank of moral duties. They admitted the traditions of the elders with the same reverence as the precepts of their lawgiver : And these traditions taught them, that designs, however pernicious, were then only criminal when they were executed (b) ; indulged to every descendant of Abraham the hope of future impunity for all crimes less than idolatry and apostacy ; and, in some instances, permitted them to sacrifice the most natural obligations at the altar of avarice or resentment. Flattered with

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(a) *A heathen could see this. See the first sentence of Sallust's Jugurthine war.*
 (b) *It is curious to find Josephus blaming Polybius for ascribing the fate of Antiochus Epiphanes to his design of plundering the Persian temple of Diana. For, says he, to intend only, and not execute, is not worthy of punishment.*

the distinction of preserving the sacred oracles, they had learned to over-rate their own importance, and to depreciate that of other nations; and, while they imagined themselves the favourites of heaven, they believed it as much their duty to hate their enemy as to love their neighbour (a).

The Jewish, was most probably the source of Heathen, morality : And, as it was already corrupted by false interpretation, and contaminated by the impure mixture of popular tradition, it could hardly be purified in its progress through countries, where human laws opposed a feeble barrier against the violence of the passions ; where reason was become the handmaid to licentiousness ; and where idolatry supplied the place of religion.

In order to ascertain the moral quality of actions, it is necessary to compare them with some rule, to which their conformity or repugnance may denominate them good or evil. Such a rule was sought by the philosophers with diligence. It was the Formula of Cicero, the Regula of Horace, the *Idea* and *Eidos* of Plato, the Exemplar Honesti of Lucan, and the *Καλόν* of Euripides. But, whether it consisted in following nature, right reason, truth, or common sense, it was too vague to be applied in cases of difficulty.

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(a) *That celebrated passage of Tacitus, (Ann. xv. sect. 44.) wherein hatred to all men is applied to Christians as well as Jews, has been much misunderstood, as if meant to describe the tempers of either : Whereas it was intended to characterize the inflexible spirit of their religion which would not accommodate itself to the rites of Polytheism. This mistake was the cause of all Voltaire's invectives against the Jews. See the Additions to his General History, p. 30, 174.*

By the help of this rule, however, the Heathens made some progress in the theory of morals. They ascertained with precision most of the duties of common life : They recommended even some of the more exalted virtues ; but while they boasted of patriotism and valour, their claim to humility and forgiveness of injuries, like that of the Jews, is doubtful and suspicious (a). And, when we recollect, that, in the most enlightened age of Rome, the human offspring was exposed without censure or remorse (b) ; that the bloody sports of the circus and the amphitheatre afforded amusement to the orator and the rhetorician, to the priest and the philosopher (c) ; that the most re-

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fined

(a) *Odi hominem, says Cicero, et odero : Utinam ulcisci possem.* Xenophon is far from blaming a spirit of insatiable revenge in the character of Gobryas. Εαν μὲν ἔν εμε συ δεχη, και ελπιδα τινα λαβοιμι τω φιλω παιδι τιμωριας αν τινος μετα σε τυχειν, και αναβησαι παλιν δοχω μοι, κη ετ' αν ζων ετι αισχυνοιμην, ετ' αποδησκων, ανιωμενος αν τελευτων δοκω. Κυρη Παιδ. δ. 24. Leuncl. Not unlike this are the characters of some of the greatest heroes of antiquity.

“ Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer.”

----- “ *Nec Cæsar ferce priorem,
Pompeiusve parem potuit.*”

----- “ *Utro implacabilis ardet
Attollitque animos.*”

“ *Anima-----fugit indignata sub umbras.*”

(b) This unnatural practice had been universal in Greece, Persia, and many other countries. Plato enjoined it, after the parents were a certain age ; and Romulus permitted it, reserving the males and the first born females. Nothing can shew more strongly the prevalence of this custom, than the language of Chremes in Terence ; who asserts that the advocates for parental affection are men, “ *qui neque jus, neque bonum, atque æquum sciunt.*” (c) *Mentior si non unus aliquis mensis Europæ stetit vicenis capitum millibus aut trecentis.* Lipsius. Saturn. lib. 1. c. 12. See also Lactantius,

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finer of the Roman poets exhibited an unnatural crime, as harmless, or even laudable, as patronized and applauded by the best of men(a); that the most venerable patriot stunned the ears of the senate, by the cry of "Delenda est Carthago;" intimated that the lustre of the Roman name would be tarnished by enduring a rival; and insisted that it was the part of honour, of justice, and of policy, to insult and exterminate a vanquished enemy;—when we recollect these facts coolly and impartially, we shall be induced to believe, not that the Romans were perfect in morals, but that, as a nation, they were insolent and unfeeling, licentious and cruel, implacable and revengeful.

Notwithstanding these defects of the pagan morality, it is but just to acknowledge, that, in almost every poetic and philosophic treatise, we find some moral truth, though mixed with fable; some diamond, sparkling in the midst of baubles, and giving lustre to the rubbish which surrounds it. Cicero taught, that religion had her throne in the heart: Seneca, that incest was committed, when the design only was formed; and, of consequence, that intention constituted the moral quality of actions (b): Plato, that forgiveness was a surer mark of a good

book 2. and Tertullian de Spectaculis, chap. 19. *Crudele gladiatorum spectaculum & inhumanum nonnullis videre solet: Et haud scio an ita sit ut nunc sit: Cum vero fontes ferro depugnabant, auribus fortasse multæ, oculis quidem nulla poterat esse fortior contra dolorem et mortem disciplina.* Tusculan Disputations, 2. 16. Seneca singly opposed this barbarous custom. Ep. 7. (a) *Formosum Corydon pastor ardebat Alexin.* Virg. Eclog. ii. 1. It may be observed, to the credit of the earlier ages of Greece, that no traces are to be found in Homer of that unnatural lust, which afterwards disgraced the Grecian and Roman manners. (b) *At hoc, si hæreditatis causâ facit, vultur est, cadaver expectat.* See also Juvenal's Satires, xiii. 195. Cic. 3. Off. 23. & 27. 1. Off. 30. Seneca, Ep. 95. And Aristot. Rhet. c. 14. *Εν τῇ προηρεσει εἶναι ἢ μοχθηρία καὶ τὸ ἀδίκειν.*

good mind than resentment (a), and that a wise man would rather suffer death than violate truth (b) : Horace, that acts of charity were due to the needy (c) : Terence, that the benevolence of a feeling mind ought to embrace the whole human offspring. Were these, and other similar doctrines collected and reduced into a system, they would compose no contemptible rule of life : But, still, they would want consistency, to make them received, and authority to make them practised.

Plato, in his 6th book of laws, forbids drunkenness in general, but allows it, where it might be expected to be most forbidden, in the sacred rites of Bacchus. Aristotle, in his politics, blames obscene pictures, but allows them, when employed in religious ceremonies. Terence, represents the same character, with one breath, professing universal benevolence ; with another, upbraiding his wife for not having exposed her new-born infant with her own hands. Some of the moralists demolished at once the systems of their brethren ; by denying any distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, truth and falsehood (d). This strange inconsistency was not peculiar to morals. Balbus in Cicero affirms, at one time, that the world is God : At another, that it is the common habitation of Gods and

(a) See also Plutarch de Irâ cobibendâ. *passim*. Sen. de Irâ, l. II. c. 32. l. III. c. 5. Juv. Sat. xiii. 139. (b) Xenophon seems not to have so well understood this maxim. Εἰ γὰρ πᾶσι φαίνοιμεθα τῆς μὲν κακῶς ποιῶντας νικᾶν πειρωμένοι κακῶς ποιῶντες, ---εἰκος φίλος μὲν ἡμῖν πολλὰς βλάπτεσθαι γιγνέσθαι, ἐχθρὸν δὲ μὴδὲν ἐπιθυμῆναι εἶναι. Κυρ. παιδ. ε. 14. Socrates, Cicero and Aristotle seem to have had no apprehension that forgiveness was a duty. They esteemed it rather a criminal and contemptible weakness. De Offic. lib. 3. Arist. Eth. l. 4. c. 11. (c) Seneca also, and Plautus taught charity, but it was chastised by prudence.

"Dabo egenti, sed ut ipse non egeam.

"Ita te aliorum miserecat, ne tui alios misereat."

(d) Ἰσα τὰ ἀμαρτήματα καὶ τὰ κατ'ὀρθότητα, was a celebrated paradox of the Stoics.

and men. As a philosopher, Cicero combats the imposture of augury (a), the paradoxes of the stoics (b), and the religious institutions of his country (c) : As a lawgiver, he strenuously defends and recommends them all.

But had the Heathen systems of morals been ever so consistent, they would have wanted authority to compel obedience. For, the ground of moral obligation, so much enquired after by modern, as well as ancient philosophers, is a discovery peculiar to Revelation. The Platonists deduced their obligation to virtue from the instinctive operations of the moral principle. Bishop Butler more justly considers the decisions of the Moral sense as indications of the divine will, and presentiments of what may be expected in a perfect state of distributive justice (d). The present Archdeacon of Carlisle, after having enumerated the arguments for and against the existence of moral instincts, concludes somewhat hastily, either that there exist no such instincts, or that now they are not to be distinguished from prejudices and habits (e). Dr. Sam. Clarke (f), Mr. Wollaston (g), Mr. Bayle (h), and Lord Shaftesbury (i), like the ancient Peripatetics, derived their chief motives to virtue from the Relations, Fitnesse, and essential Differences of things ; not considering that these Differences, &c. presuppose a Moral Governor, and were designed to assist in the interpretation of his will. Burlamaqui (j) thought that these

motives

(a) Compare his *Books of Divination* with his *Treatise of Laws*. (b) *Oration for Murena*. (c) *Orat. de Harusp. respond. in Senatu*. (d) *Sermons on Human Nature and Analogy*. (e) See *Principles of Philosophy*, book 1. chap. 5. p. 16. 2d. 4to. edit. (f) See *Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*, page 5th. 6th Edit. (g) *Rel. of Nat. delineated*, page 23. (h) *Continuation des Pensées Diverses*, l. 151. (i) *Characteristics*, *passim*. (j) *Principes du droit naturel*. 75. See also the *divine Legation of Moses*, v. 1. sect. 4th.

motives were nearly the same, and that their seeming difference arose from the incautious application of words.

It is the glory of the Gospel to have removed the obligation to morality from those deceitful foundations on which human wisdom had placed it; and to have fixed it on that only solid one, the will of God.

Revelation may, perhaps, be deemed imperfect, because it neither enumerates every distinct precept, nor determines every doubtful question. But when it is considered, that, in this country, the acts of the legislature, and the decisions of the supreme courts are not comprized in less than fifty folio volumes, it cannot surely be expected that Revelation should give a minute detail of the duties of perfect, much less of those of imperfect obligation (a). Had this been attempted, its directions must have been too intricate to be generally comprehended, and too voluminous to be either circulated or explained. It is addressed to persons already acquainted with the common principles of justice; and its general precepts are left to be interpreted by the dictates of common sense: For no directions can be prescribed for cases which seldom occur, and which are incapable of being ascertained by any previous description.

It is in cases like these that Cicero affirms custom and exercise to be necessary, in order to form a good moralist. Which seems to be the true position, whatever Wollaston thought to the contrary (b). Perhaps an instance may elucidate this subject.

Various would be the solutions, at the present day, of this ancient question: whether it would be wrong, in a wise man, to preserve, at the

(a) See Paley's *Principles of Philosophy*, book 1st, chap. 4. (b) See *Rel. of Nat. Del.* 25. notes.

the expence of truth, the life of an innocent friend who had fled to him for protection. Many, no doubt, would acquit him; and justify their decision by the example of Isaac and Abimelech. The candid and liberal part of mankind would be inclined, with Sophocles, to praise, rather than to blame him; while the severe, who, with St. Austin, enjoin an inflexible adherence to truth, would condemn him.

This example will shew the folly of expecting particular directions in Revelation; which was designed, not so much to supersede the use of political regulations, as to help human reason, and to enforce human laws.

But, although Revelation has neither the particularity, nor the precision, of civil laws; it has, nevertheless, a more powerful tendency to secure the solid interests of society. Sometimes it considers the human race as constituting one family; sometimes as composing a civil community, associated for the purpose of mutual protection, security and comfort (a). In this community, it confirms the authority of civil laws, and extends the duties of all ranks, superior as well as subordinate: It softens the resentment of individuals; it discourages the vicious maxims by which society is too often governed; it cherishes whatever is conducive to the general tranquillity; and it encourages by the most sublime promises, and enjoins, on pain of the most awful punishments, whatever is virtuous and laudable.

The concise and general directions of the Christian Revelation will best account for the seeming omission of particular duties, as friendship,

(a) *Aristotle speaking of society says, it was instituted τῷ ἔθνι evenev and continued τῷ ἐν ἔθνι. Pol. l. I. c. 2.*

ship, patriotism and valour. The omission of the two former has been imagined, by some (a), to indicate a defect in the constitution of the gospel (b). These objectors however seem to have forgotten that Christianity presupposes a knowledge of the most obvious duties; and, because they cannot find the words patriotism and friendship, they insinuate that the things themselves are wanting. They forget also that the divine publisher of the Gospel recommended, by his example, the amiable charities of private, and the useful sympathies of public life; that he wept over the grave of Lazarus; and commiserated, while he foretold, the calamities of Jerusalem.

By a similar mistake, the omission of these duties is assumed, by some of the friends of Christianity, as a proof of its divine origin (c). They call these virtues fictitious, and imagine them to be founded on false principles. But, in order to reconcile their reasoning, either to Revelation or to common sense, we must suppose, that, instead of these virtues themselves, they mean the spurious resemblances of them, which are often substituted in their place: For men of fashion are by no means unaccustomed to call the confederacies of the licentious, the contentions of the factious, and the phrenzy of the duellist, by the splendid, but sacred, appellations, of friendship, of patriotism, and of valour.

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Christianity

(a) *Characteristics*, vol. 1. p. 98. ed. 3d. (b) *The same objection will apply equally to the ancient systems of Ethics. Aristotle hesitates to allow friendship the name of virtue, though he owns it connected with it. Cicero gives to virtue a decided superiority to friendship. Virtus & conciliat amicos & conservat. De Amicitia. conclusion.* (c) See *Jenyn's Internal Evidence*, prop. 3d. p. 51. 4th ed.

Christianity has suffered much abuse, on account of the errors of its professors. These errors are however incident to human frailty, and therefore are unreasonably charged on Religion. They are the common offspring of ignorance and fraud. They are exotic scions, grafted on the stock of Revelation; but not sprung from the same root, distinguished by the same fruit, nor implanted by the same hand.

When clear and certain principles are obtained, the deductions of reason are often precarious, sometimes absurd, in almost every disquisition to which the human intellect can be applied. And, while it is remembered that advocates for human reason have contended, that there is no such thing as liberty of action(a); that the existence of incorporeal (b), nay even of material (c) beings, is no better than a pleasing illusion of fancy (d); that the distribution of good and evil depends on the influence of a planetary aspect (e); that it would be advantageous to society to obliterate the remembrance of past events by the destruction of public records(f); and that society may flourish

(a) *The controversy concerning liberty and necessity seems to have perplexed the human mind more than any other. It was discussed by the heathen sages, as well as by the fathers of the Christian Church: It was debated by the schoolmen with their usual subtilty: It was revived at the Reformation with additional ardour: And, although the zeal of the reformers has been gradually tempered with moderation, yet the Metaphysicians of the present times, though assisted with the acuteness of Clarke and Leibnitz, have not been able to reconcile the contingency of actions with the foreknowledge of God.* (b) Lord Bolingbroke. (c) Bishop Berkeley. (d) *The middle and the new Academics, like the Pyrrhorian, affected to believe that there was no perception or knowledge; not even the certainty of that to which Socrates pretended, "nisi id ipsum." Acad. Quæst. l. i. c. 12. 13.* (e) *Astrology seems coeval with superstition. It has had a long reign, from the old Babylonians to our countryman Dryden.* (f) *This was gravely proposed to the British senate, after the civil wars of the last century. It is not unlike Caligula's mad design of destroying the works of Homer.*

flourish without religion(a), and even without morality(b) : Why should it appear incredible, that weaker minds should so far mistake the nature of Christian morality, as to engage, with controversial fury, on useless speculations, or unintelligible doctrines ; to question the necessity, or to maintain the merit, of good works ; to doubt the lawfulness of an oath ; to deny the authority of the civil magistrate ; to acknowledge no sovereign but King Jesus (c) ; and to believe, that the captain of their salvation will conduct his favourites to glory, while he consigns the rest of mankind to eternal misery, for the praise and glory of his justice(d).

When the errors of superstition are sanctified by habit, they appear congenial to the bulk of mankind ; and their force can seldom be weakened by pretended sanctity, and not always subdued by genuine inspiration. The popular mistakes would therefore have been perpetuated, and their practical, as well as speculative, opinions, transmitted to distant posterity, had not God awakened the curiosity of the world, by a supernatural appeal to their senses(e). Instead, therefore, of simply publishing the Gospel, the Saviour of the world accompanied his preaching with such extraordinary facts, as attested the truth of his mission, and added authority and energy to his doc-

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trines.

(a) Boyle. (b) Mandeville. (c) See Dr. Balguy's *Sermons*, *passim*. (d) *False opinions had taken such deep root in the Church, immediately after the publication of Christianity, that one of St. John's principal motives, in writing his Gospel, was, to confute the errors of Cerinthus and of the Gnostics. See Irenæus' 3d book against Heresy, chap. 2.* (e) *Strabo thought it impossible to lead the women and the crowd to sanctity of manners, by philosophic reasoning only : He believed argument to be seldom forcible, except when associated with religious awe, with fable and prodigy. Lactantius gives the reason of this, l. 3. c. 27.*

trines. When opposed by the scepticism of unbelievers, he appealed to the accomplishment of prophecy, and to the visible interposition of divine power (a) ; and the errors, as well as the demons and oracles of polytheism, retired before that irresistible evidence, which could neither be ascribed to human sagacity, on the one hand, nor attributed, on the other, to human agency, or the operation of devils.

The religions of paganism were a sort of political institutions, adapted to the genius of the people, and the nature of their government: But, unfriendly to science and free enquiry, they converted their philosophic votaries into sceptics : and, when applied to the test of Revelation, they appeared, like Satan at the touch of Ithuriel's spear, in their real deformity. The religion of Mahomet was propagated by the sword, and established by the leader of a victorious army. Christianity, on the other hand, employs no force but that of truth. She invites mankind to examine her pretensions. She challenges the severest scrutiny ; and has hitherto repelled all the attacks, even of the most ingenious sophistry. When we contemplate her chaste form in the exemplary lives of her first converts ; when we behold her manly spirit, struggling with the rough hand of power (b), and rising superior to the cruelties of Nero and Domitian ; when we see her,

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(a) *Even Julian acknowledges that there were men divinely inspired among the Jews. It is strange that the existence of miracles should be called in question in the eighteenth century, when their truth was not attempted to be denied by Celsus, Hierocles, Perphyry, or Julian. The usual method of eluding their force was by ascribing them to magic.* (b) *Lactantius informs us of a Domitius Ulpian who wrote seven books concerning the tortures which ought to be inflicted on the Christians. Book 5. chap. 2.*

with encreasing vigour, and with new accessions of strength (a), triumphing over the artifices of Dioclesian, and the malignity of the apostate Julian; above all, when we view her entering the temples of polytheism, demolishing the shrines of Jupiter and Apollo, and at length ascending the imperial throne; can we, for a moment, ascribe effects so astonishing to causes merely human? Are we not rather compelled to acknowledge her credentials indisputable, and her origin truly divine.

Without defining the period of miracles, it may be remarked that their influence was not confined to the first propagation of Christianity. An appeal to the evidence of Revelation gives effect to the labours of the missionary at the present day. It establishes the faith of the doubtful, in those countries, where its doctrines are blended with the rites of superstition, or the maxims of false philosophy; and it may hereafter assist the beams of divine light to dissipate that mist of ignorance, which overspreads so large a portion of the earth, from the witches of Lapland, to the cannibals of New-Zealand.

Perhaps it may be suspected that the argument from prophecy depends on the assumption that the Jewish prophets were divinely inspired; and therefore, when proposed to a rational unbeliever, will revolve in a circle. Should he enquire how Christianity is proved,
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(a) *Should we withdraw ourselves from your dominions, said the Apologists of Christianity to their Roman persecutors, your government could no longer subsist. Trajan was informed by the Proconsul of Bythynia, that the Christians in that province, of both sexes, and of all ages and degrees, were become so numerous that the temples of the gods were almost deserted, and their solemn rites for a long time discontinued. Pliny's Epistles, book 10th. epist. 97. Si enim hostes exertos, non tantum vindices occultos.*

by this argument, a divine institution : It is rightly answered, Because the history and fortunes of its author were predicted by a series of prophecies, commencing with the fall of man, and continued, in a succession of connected parts, till the times of the Messiah. Should he again ask, on what authority he was to believe these prophecies ; it would be little better than begging the question to reply, on the acknowledged divinity of their inspiration : The proper answer no doubt is this. Compare the predictions with their corresponding events : Consider their number, their connection, their particularity, and the immense distance between some of the prophecies and their objects ; and, if their completion has been precise and circumstantial, it will be an easy inference that they were not devised by the folly, the fanaticism, or the collusion of men. The application of the argument thus explained, is justified, as well on the principles of sound reasoning, as by the example of the first advocates of Christianity ; who were so well satisfied of its cogency as to stake the truth of their cause on it alone, independently on all other proofs whatsoever (a).

But, had this religion been from heaven, say the enemies of our faith, it would have been accompanied with effects proportioned to the means employed ; and would have produced such permanent advantages as would have stamped universal conviction of its divine origin. For, otherwise, to what purpose is such a display of miraculous power ; and so splendid an apparatus of prophecy, continued through a long succession of ages ; and confessedly designed to administer comfort to the desponding heart, and to impress it with an
awful

(a) See the *Bishop of Worcester's Sermons on the Prophecies*, page 150, 151, vol. I. 4th edit. small 8vo.

awful sense of the importance of Revelation : Instead of answering these reasonable expectations, the advantages, even of the Christian dispensation, seem confined to the three first centuries. Within these limits indeed, the new religion procured the abolition of paganism, and accomplished a temporary reformation of manners : But, in every subsequent period, its design has been frustrated ; and, instead of mitigating, it has inflamed the malignant passions of mankind (a).

Were this representation just, Cotta's remark, concerning reason, would apply with full force to Revelation. " *Satius fuerit omnino non datam, quam tantâ cum pernicië datam* (b)." But, had these calamities been occasioned by the Religion of Jesus, they would have adhered to it peculiarly and exclusively. Instead of this, they have accompanied religious bigotry, in ancient times, before Christianity was promulged ; and in modern nations, where it has never penetrated.

The Athenians exacted an oath of all their citizens, for the security of the established religion ; and more especially of the priestesses of Bacchus, for the celebration of the rites according to the forms prescribed by their country (c).

At

(a) *The taking the superstition, the avarice, the ambition, the intolerance of Anti-christianism for Christianity, has been the great error upon which infidelity has built its system, both at home and abroad. Bishop of Llandaff's Apol. p. 220. note. This argument is so great a favourite with all our philosophical sceptics, that it is every day dressed up in some new form, and repeated incessantly with an air of peculiar triumph and exultation. Bishop of Chester's Sermons, p. 271. note.* (b) *Cicero de naturâ Deorum, lib. 3. c. 27.* (c) *See the Divine Legation, book 2. sect. 5. p. 28. last edition.*

At an early period of the Roman history, proper officers were appointed to prohibit the introduction of foreign religions, and to abolish every innovation in the accustomed mode of sacrifice (a). These early symptoms of intolerance became afterwards more alarming, when the influx of foreign deities had multiplied the gods of Rome; and when it was deemed necessary to guard the established rites, by a decree of the Senate and an edict of the Pretor (b). The prevalence of bigotry may be collected, as well from the avowed opinion of Livy, as from the sentiments of the most polished courtier of the Augustan age. The latter advised the Emperor to worship the Gods himself, after the manner of his ancestors; to compel his subjects to adhere to the established institutions; and to hate and punish those who should attempt to introduce a foreign superstition (c); and Tacitus informs us that this advice was strictly followed (d).

From these circumstances, it will be natural to entertain a doubt concerning the mild indifference of antiquity (e); and to suspect, that the

- (a) *Datum inde negotium Aedilibus, &c. Livy's Hist. l. 4. c. 30. l. 39. c. 16. The words of this historian are very remarkable on this occasion. Sacrificulos, vatesque foro, circo, urbe prohiberent; vaticinos libros conquirerent, comburerentque: omnem disciplinam sacrificandi, præterquam more Romano, abolerent. See also Valer. Max. l. 1. c. 3. n. 2. & Tac. Annals, l. 14. c. 30. The extirpation of the Druids affords no favourable idea of Roman toleration.* (b) *Livy, l. 25. c. 1. Several Roman laws to this purpose, preserved by Tertullian, Eusebius, Julius Paulus, Cicero, and Plato, are collected by Fortin. Discourses, p. 57. 58. note.* (c) *Το μὲν θεῖον παντὶ παντὶ αὐτὸς τε σέβει, κατὰ τὰ πατρία, καὶ τὰς ἄλλας τιμὰν ἀναγκάζει. Dion. Cass. L. 52. Cassius' testimony has been suspected, perhaps without sufficient reason.* (d) *Annal. l. 11. c. 81.* (e) *Bishop Warburton, who thinks favourably of the toleration of paganism, acknowledges it was at an end, when the supreme power fell into the hands of one man, and when the interest of the magistrate became distinct from that of the people. D. L. book 2. sect. 6. p. 71.*

the Roman princes did not, at all times, behold, "without concern, a thousand forms of religion subsisting in peace under their gentle sway (a)."

When we consider the nature of polytheism, we shall wonder how intolerance could ever find a place in it; for it was an opinion, common to the wiser part of all idolatrous nations in the world, that the Deity receives as much pleasure, in being honoured by different forms of worship, as in being glorified by different orders of beings, according to the knowledge each has acquired of his nature and perfections. But, it is no longer uncommon to be mistaken in reasoning a priori.

The sacred wars of the Greeks exhibit another instance of vindictive zeal; but the mischiefs, occasioned by them, may be deduced from the natural operations of an ambitious mind. The artificial, but expressive, phrase of "the Priests Philippizes(b)," is a clear proof that the Athenians suspected Religion to be but a cloke to Philip's ambition; and the event of these wars incontestably shews, that the King of Macedon was, in reality, seeking his own aggrandisement; while he pretended to vindicate the honour of the God, and to execute the orders of the Amphyctyonic council.

Whether then we consider the foregoing instances; or the contests for modes of worship among the Ombites and Tentyrites in Egypt(c);

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the

(a) *Gibbon's History*, vol. 1st, page 519. Julian himself, when contending for the toleration of Paganism, asserts the Jewish doctrines of the sabbath and the unity of God, as too unreasonable to be tolerated. (b) *Æschines in Ctesiphont.* μβ. Foulkes & Freind. (c) See the fifteenth Satire of Juvenal; *Euseb. Præp. Evang.* 32. *Plut. de Is. & Osir.* 676, 677. Steph. edit. And Bishop of Chester's Sermons, page 273. note. 2d. edit.

the intolerance of the Roman Emperors(a), and even of the philosophic Julian (b); and the struggles between the kings of Siam and Pegu for the possession of a contemptible relique; we shall find them not unlike the effusion of Christian blood, by the Crusades and the Inquisition; and shall be inclined to refer events so similar, to a similarity of causes.

In order to investigate the causes of intolerance among Christians(c), it would be necessary to explore the page of ecclesiastic history, from the beginning of the fourth, to the middle of the present century. But the limits of this essay will permit us to glance only at a few well-known facts. Before the former period, the Roman Emperors were familiar with despotism and war: They were accustomed to receive from their subjects unlimited obedience: And when they avowed themselves the patrons of Christianity, it was suitable to their habits, to prescribe the faith of their subjects, with the same authority, with which they enacted the laws of the state; and to enforce their own formularies, with the same violence, with which they extended the boundaries of the Empire.

The

(a) *Never was a historical fact better authenticated than this, that the Heathen Emperors persecuted the Christians for their faith alone: Yet Voltaire, in his discourse De la Tolerance, has ventured to deny it.* (b) *See Tillemont. Ruine Des Juifs. vol. 1. art. 5. p. 420. Tacitus, lib. 11. c. 85. Also Tillemont on the persec. of Trajan.* (c) *Lord Shaftesbury hastily deduced them from the intolerance of Egypt. See Charac. vol. 3. Miscel. 2. Voltaire is justly censured by Bishop Warburton, (Div. Leg. book 2. sec. 6. p. 49. note. last edit.) for deriving the intolerance of Christianity from its republican spirit. Perhaps the learned Prelate was himself mistaken in ascribing it wholly to a system of dogmatic theology, page 48, 49. vol. 11. last edit.*

The Barbarians of the north, who dismembered the western provinces, had blended the ferocity of their manners with the love of martial achievements. They had introduced military notions, as much into their religious, as their civil, government. They had learned, from long custom, to repel a criminal accusation, and to defend the rights of conscience, by the keenness of their weapons, and the dexterity of their limbs: And when they had erected independent kingdoms on the ruins of the western empire, their ferocity was easily transfused into the temper of their vanquished subjects(a).

At the revival of letters, the heathen writers were held in high estimation. Their orators, poets and moralists were perused with avidity. They were believed to contain the rudiments of knowledge as well as of taste; and, of course, were soon deemed essential to polite education. The ancient modes of thinking and of acting, their systems of policy and of morals, were, by these means, incorporated with the principles of Christianity. The wrath of an Achilles, the ambition of a Cæsar, the haughtiness of a Cato, and the revenge of a Gobryas were presented to the mind under the most flattering appearances, at an age when it receives the strongest biases, and admits the most lively impressions. From this combination of heathen and christian virtues, arose that mixture of charity and bigotry, compassion and resentment, liberality and persecution, forbearance and revenge, which, to this day, perplex and chequer the human character.

When these fierce passions become principles of action, their effects are inconceivably tremendous. They have occasioned the most eventful and fatal commotions; and therefore it is no wonder, that,

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when

(a) See *Bishop of Chester's Sermons*, p. 281, 282, and 286.

when under the guidance of ambition, or of mistaken zeal, they have so often desolated the earth, from the wars against the Waldenses, to the revocation of the edict of Nantes.

The progress of these religious dissensions may be deduced, in many instances, from causes merely political. They have been always enflamed by personal resentment and factious intrigue. The Crusades themselves were instigated by the avarice of Pope Hildebrand and Urban the second; and were afterwards prolonged from motives of ambition(a). Whatever then were the calamities which flowed from these dissensions, they may be attributed to the crimes of mistaken Christians; of men, who, under the mask of Religion, were impelled by interest or passion; but cannot be assumed as consequences of the Christian Revelation.

These enormities of the Romish Church are continually exciting the sneer of the Infidel; while they seem defensible at least, if not meritorious, to the deluded Papist. It is of no weight, indeed, in the scale of reason, that they are admired by the blind fanaticism of the multitude: And they could not have appeared in any other light, than as proceeding from the ignorance, the prejudice, or the wickedness of particular men, had they not found advocates in men of such repute as M. Crevier(b), and the celebrated Bishop of Meaux(c).

It

(a) See *Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History* by Maclaine, vol. 2. p. 237. note. 1774. 8vo. where, though a contrary opinion is advanced, it is fairly shewn that the motives here mentioned were assigned, not only by many protestant historians, but also by Bened. Accoltus, Basnage, Vertot, and Baillet. (b) *Histoire des Variations*, l. x. p. 51. 12mo. Paris. (c) *Hist. De l'Université de Paris*, vol. 3d. book 6. p. 435. 12mo. Paris.

It would be needless to recount, for the sake of obviating, the many objections which Popery has furnished against the cause of Christianity. It may suffice to dismiss them all with this general remark, that, when St. John beheld, through the prophetic mirror, the future fortunes of the Church passing in review before him ; he was filled with astonishment, at the secularity, the intolerance, and the idolatry, of Papal Rome.

These perversions of the Gospel then, far from being a real objection, are a confirmation of its truth ; as they prove, beyond contradiction, the divinity of that spirit, with which its teachers were inspired.

If we quit the illusions of fancy, and, instead of looking for the return of innocence, recollect the facts which history has recorded ; we shall find, that the councils of God are not formed on the principles of human wisdom. It seems to be his divine purpose, to accomplish the great ends of Revelation, after long obstructions, and by slow, but progressive steps (a) : And we have the satisfaction of knowing, that the same divine spirit, which revealed the corruptions of the dark ages, announced, at the same time, a succession of better things to come.

However imperfect the morals of Christian societies may be deemed, they are essentially improved since the times of paganism. A few instances will evince, that they are as much superior to the manners of antiquity, as the mild temperature of a summer's evening to the roughness of a wintry storm : Or, as much as the most sublime conception

(a) See the *Bishop of Worcester's Sermons on the Prophecies*, p. 207. vol. 2d.

conception of the universe exceeds the narrow ideas of the peasant, who imagines the circle of created being to be terminated by the limits of his own horizon.

The *Odyſſey* affords a ſingular proof of the rude ſtate of morality, in the early ages of Greece. Penelope's ſuitors hesitated to murder Telemachus, until they could conſult Jupiter, concerning the propriety of ſo foul a crime. Not becauſe they ſtartled at the idea of murder, but, becauſe the victim propoſed was of royal deſcent.

Glaucus was eſteemed a man of uncommon integrity : Yet he conſulted the oracle at Delphi, in order to procure a diſpenſation for a perjury to be committed ; and to obtain the ſanction of the god, in appropriating to his own uſe the money which his Mileſian gueſts had depoſited in his hands (a).

Julius Cæſar was as humane as any one that ever commanded the Roman Legions ; yet his own commentaries inform us of a “ Vir-
cingetorix per tormenta necatus.”

Germanicus Cæſar burnt the cities of the Marſians ; ravaged the country with fire and ſword ; and, in the general maſſacre, made no diſtinction of ſex or age.

Titus reſerved ſome of the Jewiſh captives for the public recreation ; and delivered both women and children to be torn in pieces by the ſavage monſters of the deſert (b).

Should it be ſaid that theſe are detached inſtances ; and prove the depravity of individuals only : We anſwer, that none of theſe crimes,
horrid

(a) *Juvenal*, xiii. 199. *Jortin's Diſcourſes*, p. 76. (b) See *Grotius de Jure Belli*, iii. 4. 9, &c.

horrid as they now seem, were branded with public censure, except that of Glaucus ; and therefore may be assumed, as distinctive characters of the state of public morals,

The calamities of war are common, perhaps, in some respects, to a Christian, and a pagan army : But, in no part of modern history can an instance of cruelty be assigned, so extraordinary in its nature, and so unparalleled in its extent, as the death of Patroclus. The conqueror, not satisfied with the slaughter of his foe, pushed his resentment to the other world. He gave his carcase to the dogs ; that, being deprived of the rites of burial, his soul might be debarred from repose, and wander, as an exile, for a hundred years.

To alledge that this instance is not a historical fact, will be no diminution of its force. The Poet would not have risked his reputation, in ascribing to a hero such a conduct, as was unsuitable to that nature, which, he well knew, it was the perfection of his art to imitate.

Perhaps the infidel will be willing to contrast this cruelty, with others which have tarnished the Christian name ; as the massacre of the Bohemian martyrs at Constance, or the crimes perpetrated by the soldiers of the Duke of Alva. But the degree of cruelty will not admit of comparison. Besides, the deep impression, which instances of the latter kind usually make on sober minds, is an indication of their rarity : For if they were familiar, and common to all Christian societies, they would not be the occasion of unusual complaint. In saying this, however, we mean not to palliate the enormities of the Romish church : We leave them to be defended, if indeed they admit of defence, by the apologists of her own communion.

When

When we compare the state of protestant, and even of many catholic countries, with that of the Mahometan or Pagan world, we cannot be backward to ascribe the superiority of the former over the two latter, to the benign influence of the Christian religion. Nothing else could have tamed, so effectually, the fierceness of the mind ; and infused into it that gentleness of disposition, and liberality of sentiment which distinguish Christendom from the rest of the world. Nothing else could have guarded, so powerfully, the authority of the prince, and the liberties of the subject. Nothing else could have tempered, so humanely, the rigours of war with clemency, or the severity of penal laws with mercy. In short, nothing but Christianity could have introduced that urbanity, and reciprocation of good offices, which add a relish to domestic enjoyment, and combine elegance and tranquillity with the duties of public life.

Should the Deist reply, with Voltaire, that the advantages of Christendom were derived from the study of philosophy, and the cultivation of the liberal arts(a); it would be incumbent on him to prove, that human learning had made no progress in the Roman Empire, in the age of Augustus ; when cruelties were authorized by the Prince, and applauded by the philosopher, which, at the present day, would be abhorrent from the principles of an European peasant.

Perhaps it is owing as much to the indolence, as the perverseness, of the mind, that Christianity has not effected an universal reformation, where it is established by law. The goodness of God consists in giving us capacities of happiness, and in furnishing us with means of enjoyment ; and when we neglect to improve our opportunities, we
contract

(a) *De la Tolerance*, ch. 4. p. 30---44.

contract the sphere of our own happiness, without diminishing the beneficence of heaven.

If it be said that this beneficence would have been more fully manifested, by making us happy at once ; instead of proposing happiness to our hopes, and risking the attainment of it upon the doubtful conflict of faith and sense : It is replied, that Revelation may, possibly, be a part only, of a general scheme of Providence ; of which we have a very imperfect conception (a). So far, however, as we are able to trace the operations of God, we find it his invariable purpose to bend human agents to the yoke of discipline ; and to qualify them for happiness by the exercise of their active and moral powers. The natural world affords antidotes against poisons, and medicines against sickness ; but, the discovery and application of these remedies are left wholly to our own industry and discretion. The constitution, then, of the natural, is similar to that of the moral world. In both, much depends on our own conduct : We become happy, or miserable, in proportion as we improve, or neglect, the blessings of Providence.

Now this very possibility of procuring happiness is clearly a positive advantage. Were it procured, in all cases, to our hands, it would prevent the acquisition of virtuous habits ; it would leave no scope for resolution or exertion ; it would destroy all choice of action ; and supersede the necessity, even of acting at all(b). It would be a happiness, suitable enough to the Epicurean, or the Mahometan

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paradise ;

(a) See Butler's *Analogy*, part 1. c. vii. and v. *Benevolence asserted. On General Laws.*

(b) See Dr. Balguy's *Divine*

paradise ; but unsatisfactory to a sober heathen, and far superior to those active pleasures which will crown the success of the Christian warfare (a).

When we compare our moral imbecility with the purity of the divine laws, we ought to be penetrated with the most lively gratitude, by the offers of pardon, of grace, and of immortality, which are gradually indeed, but, at length, clearly and universally announced in the page of Revelation. They were planned for our benefit, and are happily suited to our desires. They dispel our fears, stimulate our virtue, purify our principles, and fill our boundless hopes. They demonstrate incontestibly the goodness of God, in promoting the happiness of man.

If the Christian Revelation be thus peculiarly beneficial, it may seem strange that it was rejected by the Jews, and persecuted by the Heathens. We reply that the assumption is true in part only ; many thousands of the Jews (b), and so great a number of the Gentiles(c), that they crowded the armies and councils, the senate and the courts of Justice(d), having yielded to the powerful evidence of Christianity(e). Nor were these converts altogether among the most abject of

(a) *Velleius says concerning the life of the Gods, Ea videlicet quâ nihil beatius. Nihil enim agit, nullis occupationibus est implicatus, nulla opera molitur. Cicero de Naturâ Deorum, lib. 1. c. 19. At etiam pueri, cum cessent, exercitatione aliquâ ludicrâ delectantur, ibid. c. 37. Ψεύδος ἐστὶ τὸ εὐθυμεῖν τὰς μὴ πολλὰ πρᾶσσοντας. Plutarch Περὶ εὐθυμίας. (b) Acts xxi. 20. (c) St. Paul preached with success in many parts of the Roman Empire. Ὁρᾷ αὐτὸν ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλὴμ εἰς Ἰσπανίαν τρέχοντα. Chrysost. Homil. 75. in Matt. T. ii. p. 469. Galat. i. 17. Rom. xv. 19. 24. 28. (d) The words of Tertullian are remarkably expressive. *Vestra omnia implevimus, urbes, insulas, castella, municipia, conciliabula, castra ipsa, tribus, decurias, palatium, senatum, forum.* (e) *Britannorum inaccessa Romanis loca, Christo vero subdita. Tertull. Adv. Jud. c. vii.**

of the people. The catalogue of the early profelytes is ennobled by the names of Irenæus, Tertullian, Clemens, Cyprian and Origen. Some of them were members of societies which were in high reputation. Joseph of Arimathea belonged to the Jewish Sanhedrim, Dionysius to the Areopagus at Athens, and Flavius Clemens to the Senate at Rome (a).

The unbelieving Jews indeed endeavoured to render the Christians obnoxious to the Roman government, by accusing them of sedition and of atheism. They anathematized Christ and his followers in their synagogues, under the appellation of Nazarenes ; and, to this day, they continue that practice in the celebration of the passover. They pursued those, who renounced the service of the tabernacle, with such implacable fury, that Constantine the Great threatened to commit them alive to the flames, unless they desisted from their bloody outrages. Even so late as the fourth century, they procured from the king of Persia, under a false insinuation of treason, almost a total abolition of the Christian name (b).

The heathens, at first, lent a willing ear to the new Religion. Alexander Severus introduced it into his closet ; and Tiberius proposed it to the senate, as worthy of being admitted among the national establishments. But they expected, from Christianity, the same indulgence in favour of polytheism : They expected its followers to acknowledge the divinity of their gods, by burning incense on their altars(c) : And when this was refused, they maintained against them a determined and bloody persecution.

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(a) See Addison's *Evidences*, page 26, & 28. (b) See Collier's *Sacred Interpreter*, vol. 2d. page 147. 2d Edit. (c) See the tenth Book of Pliny's *Epistles*, ep. 97. And Aurelius' words, recorded in Euseb. *Eccl. Hist.* l. iv. c. 13.

To what cause then do we ascribe this implacable hatred of Jews and Gentiles? Undoubtedly to a general corruption of moral principle, which perverted their judgment by warping their inclination. The depravity of the Jews was so universal as to convince their historian, that, had they not been extirpated by the Romans, they would have been reserved for some more signal calamity; that they would have been swallowed up by an earthquake, or consumed by fire from heaven(a). And, lest we should judge more favourably of the Sanhedrim, the same historian informs us that the most sacred offices were filled, not by men of irreproachable characters, but by those who obtained the favour of the Governors by the common arts of adulation and bribery.

The vices of the heathens were neither less general(b), nor of less magnitude(c). Under the triumvirate, there seems to have been a total want of subordination in the Roman Youth. And it has been computed, that in the reign of Claudius, during the short space of five years, more parricides were committed, than had ever disgraced their annals since the foundation of Rome(d).

But, the strongest proof of the corruption of morals appears from the profanation of the mysteries. Venerable as these institutions were, at their first establishment, they soon became subservient to the purposes of revenge and lust: And when, in some countries, the abuses of the mysterious rites had caused a prohibition of them all, except those of Ceres, there were not wanting men, who deliberately mixed in the nocturnal sacrifices; and polluted those ceremonies of the Good
Goddeſs,

(a) *Josephus*, Περὶ τῆς Ἰουδαίας πόλεως. v. xiii. 6. (b) *Tusc. Disp.* ii. 4.
(c) *The courts of judicature at Rome were so corrupt, that a wealthy delinquent was seldom, if ever punished. Cic. in Verrem. Orat. i.* (d) *Seneca De Clement. i.*

Goddeſs, which, before, it had been deemed ſacrilege for men to behold (a).

At a time, diſtinguiſhed by ſuch profligacy of manners, it is no wonder that the heathens diſregarded the advantages of a ſyſtem, which required them to renounce their licentious habits; or even, that they perſecuted a religion, which inſiſted on integrity of conduct and purity of heart.

But, it may ſtill be ſaid that this reaſoning applies only to the multitude, and no way affects the enlightened, the virtuous few, who overlooked the advantages of the Chriſtian Revelation, and adhered to the worſhip of their fathers.

Perhaps theſe worthies of antiquity, whoſe virtues have been ſo invidiouſly extolled, were not ſo immaculate as they are generally eſteemed. Socrates was guilty of intemperate anger: Plato and Ariſtippus of baſe adulation: Epicurus, Ariſtotle, and many others, of vague and licentious amours (b): Zeno of impurities, which it is no longer decent to name: And the elder Cato, of withdrawing the neceſſary means of ſubſiſtence from his ſlaves, whenever they became uſeleſs, through infirmities or old age (c).

Many other cauſes might be aſſigned, for their oppoſition to a religion ſo beneficial in its tendency; but as we are now conſidering the

(a) See the *Divine Legation*, book 2. ſect. 4. (b) Perhaps this will not ſeem ſtrange, when it is conſidered that even Plato allowed a community of wives. Quintilian informs us that the moſt notorious vices were concealed under the name of philoſophy. *Inſt.* l. 1. præf. See more of this ſubject in *Ariſt. Eth.* l. 2. c. 3. (c) *Plutarch's Life of Cato*. For the daring impiety of the ancient ſages, ſee the *Choix de l'Academie des Inſcriptions*, vol. 2. p. 203.

the advantages, not the evidences, of Christianity; it may suffice, for the present, to reply, with Saint Paul, that the Jews required a sign, and the Greeks sought after wisdom. Each of them had contrived their own scheme of Religion; and, rather than relinquish their prejudices, discarded a system they did not approve(a). From the figurative descriptions of the prophets, the Jews expected a Messiah, invested with the ensigns of royalty. They imagined he would emancipate them from the yoke of slavery, and restore them to independence and prosperity. The sign they expected was that of a national deliverer, visibly descending from the clouds of heaven. When therefore, they beheld the divine Saviour, in the character of a servant: When, instead of erecting his throne at Jerusalem, and ruling over the willing nations, they heard him declare that his kingdom was not of this world; they turned from him with disappointment, and dismissed his pretensions without enquiry.

The Greeks, on the other hand, had made some advancement in knowledge, and had obtained the character of superior wisdom: But their wisdom was ostentatious, rather than useful. They were ambitious of excelling, in metaphysical acuteness, in subtle declamation, and in curious distinctions. When, therefore, they heard the Gospel expounded in the Areopagus (b), they were disappointed in not finding it recommended by studied phraseology, magnificent periods, and the brilliancy of wit and fancy. Dazzled with the meretricious ornaments, which sparkled in the false eloquence of the times, they could not perceive the chaster beauties of perspicuity and brevity; especially in a religion which demanded the regulation of

(a) See the Bishop of Chester's Sermons. Discourse x. throughout. (b) The judges of this court were no longer the severe censors who commanded the advocates *neque principia dicere, neque miserationem commovere.*

their faith, and treated the institutions of Athens, as a pernicious and absurd superstition. Struck, however, with the boldness of its pretensions, and astonished at the sublimity of its precepts, they were eager (a) to know its peculiar doctrines. But, when they were informed of a crucified Saviour, of the resurrection of the body, and a future judgment; they concluded, without hesitation, that it could not be from God, because it was not consistent with the Greek philosophy.

These reflections, if pursued to some length, will convince a reasonable enquirer, that the philosophers were not more worthy than the Jews of the heavenly present; and that their rejection of it, when offered, proves only that their prejudices were more powerful than their sense of interest and love of truth. The Gospel was tendered to the world, simple and unadorned. It spared no vices; it complied with no errors, it accommodated itself to no institutions: It trusted to no protection but its own native excellence: And the event proved it infinitely superior to human violence, not only when opposed by Domitian and the Maximiani, but even when Trajan, the Antonines and the younger Pliny was numbered among its bitterest enemies.

Among the many sublime discoveries of Revelation, there must be many things imperfectly unfolded, respecting the nature, the attributes, the providence, and the mysterious dispensations of the Deity. But as these subjects are, in their own nature, beyond the present limits of the human understanding, they afford no reasonable objection. The most acute philosopher cannot assign the constitution, on which the properties of body depend. He is baffled by the most
simple

(a) See Acts 17. 21. *Demosthenes often reproaches the Athenians for their vain and idle curiosity.*

simple productions of nature'; and therefore, he has no reason to expect, that Revelation would be "one cloudless emanation of light and glory (a)."

As yet, we see but in part; and therefore we see many difficulties; But, amidst all the difficulties of Revelation, we can discern, on every hand, its general purpose and happy tendency; and the more we contemplate its advantages, the more we are compelled to admire, with Montequieu, the wonderful contrivance of a system; which, while its immediate object is the attainment of future happiness, has also a direct tendency to promote the felicity of the present world.

In a perfect state, our faculties will be matured, and our knowledge enlarged. It would therefore be suitable to the present dawn of existence, to suspend our doubts during the progress, and to wait with patience for the completion, of this plan of goodness: When we shall see without an enigma; when we shall understand the mysteries which elude the ken of angels; and when our state of discipline shall be at once abolished, and consummated, by a state of endless felicity.

(a) *Bishop of Worcester's Sermons, page 85. vol. 1.*

THE END.